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ABSTRACT

Focusing generally on counseling and career planning, this symposium provides (1) a review and critique of guidance and counseling in Malaysian schools, by Amir Awang and Latiff Mirasa; (2) a discussion of the needs of Malaysian youth, by Mohd. Yunus Mohd. Noor; and (3) an abstract of the findings of a study of some aspects of student development in Malaysian universities, by T. Marimuthu. The review and critique specifically offers a brief historical overview of guidance services in the Malaysian education system, a short review of career guidance research, a review of findings focused on adolescents' attitudes about career guidance in the schools, and recommendations for improving facilities, activities, personnel, and policy. The discussion of the needs of Malaysian youth explores three different perspectives involving students' personal, educational, and vocational backgrounds. The first two perspectives describe the kinds of change that Malaysian youth currently experience; the last examines in detail the vocational needs of Malaysian youth and pressures confronting them. In conclusion, suggestions involving families, schools, and the nation are offered for solving the personal, educational, and vocational problems discussed. The report of the development of Malaysian university students very briefly profiles student aspirations, characteristics of popular students, social and leisure activities, social interaction among students, and changes in students' personality characteristics. (RH)

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SYMPOSIUM V A: Counselling and Career Planning

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Guidance and Counselling in Malaysian Schools: A Review and Critique

Amir Awang and Latiff Mirasa

INTRODUCTION

Guidance which provides the basic services of pupil inventory, information services, counselling, placement/orientation and evaluation/research is relatively new in the Malaysian education system. Various efforts, formal and informal, and by the Ministry of Education and voluntary organisations have been undertaken since its inception in 1967, resulting in various forms or degrees of accomplishment and achievement. About eighteen years have passed since its inception. It is perhaps appropriate to take a closer look at the services now and to ascertain to what extent they have provided the necessary assistance and guidance to the adolescents in schools.

We propose to divide this brief paper into four major aspects, namely,

(1) a brief historical overview of guidance services in the Malaysian education system with a view to providing the framework for better understanding;
(2) a brief review of researches that have been done in relation to career guidance;
(3) a review of what our present-day adolescents have to say about career guidance in schools; and finally
(4) our views/recommendations on how to further enhance the services, if the current practices are seen to be deficient in certain aspects.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In order to understand better the sub-sections that follow, we feel a brief overview of guidance programme in Malaysia is useful.

As we have stated at the onset, guidance made its first formal appearance in 1967, arising from the Ministry of Education's policy that was made in 1963 which stipulated that *all* schools, especially at the secondary level, should have their own-guidance teachers. In 1968, a three-day seminar in the states of Kedah, Pulau Pinang and Selangor was conducted with a view to providing manpower to manage and organise guidance services. In the same year, a Service Circular of the Ministry of Education 5209/30/(13) dated 1 September, 1968 was issued. The circular instructed *all* heads of schools to appoint guidance teachers who would have a reduced teaching load and be free from co-curricular involvement. Those appointed were expected to devote as much time as possible to guidance. Unfortunately, progress was slow due to various unforeseen circumstances including the shortage of teachers.

However, in 1969, with financial assistance from Unicef, 275 teachers attended a six-day course which marked the beginning of a series of similar courses till about 1972 when the financial assistance from Unicef was terminated.

As more systematic and organised courses were conducted, guidance teachers became better informed, better motivated and could provide better services. A need to supervise and to streamline guidance services in schools in order to achieve better results became obvious. Hence in 1970, six regional guidance officers were appointed with specific terms of reference. One would have thought that guidance services in the schools would have improved by now. Unfortunately, improvements were neither visible nor were they very significant. The failure was attributed to various factors, including the *perceived* lack of understanding and support from the school heads, due partly to their ignorance of the programme as well as to the greater emphasis on examinations. The provisions in the service circulars of the Ministry were not fully implemented. Hence, retardation in guidance services in the schools.

In 1974, an assistant director of the Guidance Unit was appointed to lend support to the Director in planning and organising training programmes to boost further the guidance services. As a result of the training programmes that were organised, some 3,000 teachers were trained for the secondary schools and about 480 for the primary schools. A survey in 1979 revealed, however, that out of this number, only 700 were still carrying out their guidance duties. A vast majority have been promoted to perform other duties or moved out of guidance services.

To ensure that *all* teachers trained after 1970 have been exposed to guidance and counselling, the Teacher Education Division of the Ministry of Education has included in its revised teacher-education curriculum a

basic element of guidance. The curriculum has constantly been reviewed and revised, and presently, guidance and counselling is adequately included to enable newly-trained teachers to understand the basic philosophy and principles of guidance and even to practise them in their daily routine.

As far as universities are concerned, guidance and counselling has always been an important part and parcel of the teacher-education programme. The 'new breed' obviously has an advantage over the earlier batches of students.

The Specialist Teachers' Training Institute, the National University and the University of Agriculture (all in Kuala Lumpur) have started a one-year specialist course in guidance, a diploma programme in counselling and a Bachelor of Education degree course in counselling respectively over the last few years. It is envisaged that the product of these institutions will provide a strong core of professionals who will eventually be full-time professional counsellors in schools, as recommended by the Cabinet Committee Report, 1980. The leadership provided by those who have obtained their Masters or Doctorate degrees overseas and locally in enhancing the above-mentioned programmes cannot be ignored.

That guidance and counselling is an important component of education has rarely been disputed. Any deficiency in the implementation of the programme in schools is probably due to the tussle among the priorities. Under the current climate, academic achievement has always been given top priority. Hence, any programme that is seen to be less directly related to academic work will somewhat be given less priority.

However, these deficiencies have often been met by voluntary organisations such as the State Vocational Guidance Associations, the Malaysian Vocational Guidance Association, the Association of Counsellors of Malaysia, the Lion Club, the Rotary Club, the Befrienders and a whole host of other voluntary organisations. The major drawback, as we see it, is that these organisations tend to be urban-based. As a result, a great majority of the rural students have been deprived of the opportunities and benefits which are also not readily available in the rural schools. In both cases, the rural students are at a disadvantage. It is perhaps timely that a more viable and wholesome strategy be planned and implemented so that both rural and urban adolescents can derive similar benefits.

Since the Guidance Unit of the Ministry of Education has been placed within the School Division of the Ministry, the training and implementation programmes have improved. We hope that the present pace will be sustained, if not enhanced, so that adolescents in schools could be 'guided' and 'counselled' toward a more meaningful and satisfying future.

REVIEW OF RESEARCHES

Although guidance services have been introduced into the Malaysian education system some eighteen years ago, the number of researches pertaining to career guidance is relatively few. Most of them constitute dissertations for Bachelor of Education (post-graduate) and Master of Education degrees. Other available researches in the same area come from the academic exercises or projects by the Diploma of Counselling students from the National University.

A cursory look at these researches show that they tend to focus on career choices (Rahimah., 1982), factors influencing career choices (D'Cruz, 1967; Reutens, 1967), vocational preferences (Amir Awang, 1970; Ai Chin, 1975), attitudes and values toward some selected careers (Mbogo, 1971). knowledge about careers (Amir Awang, 1970; Rahimah. 1982) and others. The findings of a few of these researches are briefly presented below.

Mary Reutens (1967) who was studying the vocational choice of boys in Forms III and V discovered, among other things, that the choices tended to be narrow and stereotyped. The choice of vocations were influenced by interest, job prestige, altruistic values and aspirations.

In the same year, D'Cruz (1967) in surveying the vocational interests and occupational choices of Form V students found that their choices tended to be influenced by their own teachers. It was also found that there was a disparity between interest in and choice of a job. In addition, the subjects were found to be fairly ignorant of job requirements when asked to make vocational choices commensurate with their educational background. Like Reutens, D'Cruz also found that the primary factors influencing choice were interest, ability, altruistic values and extrinsic reward system.

A study by Catherine Symons (1977) revealed some interesting facts. She was exploring the opinions of students, guidance teachers and administrators with regard to guidance programme in the school. As far as students were concerned, the following data was collected:

64.9% – did not see their cumulative record card (001 and 002 cards).
29.9% – felt that little had been done to help identify their abilities, interests, etc.
4.7% – had discussion with the guidance teacher.
69.6% – were afraid/could not find a way to approach the guidance teacher.
66.8% – felt that not enough activities have been done in the school.
87.0% – did not discuss their vocational plans.
43.0% – did not get information on the role of guidance teacher.
85.4% – felt that guidance is necessary.

On the other hand, data on the guidance teachers and administrators reveal the following statistics:

65.0% – felt that they have helped the students.
44.2% – felt the cumulative record cards were not used for the students.
53.5% – indicated that special rooms for guidance were not available. Also, guidance teachers did not have enough time.
16.3% – felt that information services were sufficient.
95.6% – felt that co-curricular activities were important.
97.8% – felt that guidance activities were very important for orientation purposes.

The available researches are not only limited in number but also in scope. The findings do confirm several hunches or assumptions as well as shed some light on various aspects of guidance and conscelling which are useful in as far as the guidance teacher is concerned. Similar findings have also been reported in various international journals. Obviously, career guidance is not that narrow in scope. New areas need to be explored to provide better understanding and better strategies for effective career guidance services.

In the light of what we already know from these studies, we have embarked upon a small exploration to investigate the current status of guidance in schools as viewed by the students. It is hoped that our findings will give an up-to-date picture of guidance services in the schools that are involved in the study.

CAREER GUIDANCE AS PERCEIVED BY THE PRESENT-DAY STUDENTS

This project was undertaken with a view to soliciting the perceptions and experiences of about 142 students in some selected secondary schools. The schools selected were located in both rural and urban settings. To cater for

Table 1
Distribution of Subjects

Academic Stream	Race	Urban		Rural		Total
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
Arts	Malay	10	10	10	9	39
	Chinese	0	2	1	6	9
	Indian	8	2	3	2	15
Science	Malay	10	10	10	12	42
	Chinese	8	11	6	6	31
	Indian	0	0	4	2	6
Total		36	35	34	37	142

uniformity, the school chosen did not (and still do not) have professionally trained counsellors either from the Specialist Teachers' Training Institute or the National University. These guidance teachers, however, had some exposure to guidance and counselling through short courses.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the subjects by sex, ethnic background and academic streams.

A questionnaire containing 55 questions pertaining to a brief background information about the students, and his/her view, knowledge, and aspirations about guidance services in the school where he/she is currently studying.

From the responses given, the following statistics were obtained:

99.3% – there are guidance teachers.
59.2% – have guidance rooms.
33.3% – career section found in school libraries.
76.6% – bulletin boards were available.
93.7% – knew the guidance teachers.
22.5% – had discussion with guidance teachers.
15.6% – found the discussion very satisfactory.
73.3% – found the discussion satisfactory.
13.3% – organised guidance exhibition.
48.9% – attended career talks.
25.3% – found career talks useful and in line with their interest.
36.6% – were provided tips on job selection.
7.1% – found the guidance services very satisfactory.
60.7% – found the guidance services satisfactory.
32.1% – found the guidance services not satisfactory.

With regard to choice of jobs, students were asked to indicate first, second and third preferences. Holland's occupational typology was used for this purpose. We found the following statistics:

Table 2
Job Preferences of Students In Percentages

Job	Order of Preferences					
	First		Second		Third	
Job I	Realistic	40.8%	Investigative	24.6%	Social	14.1%
Job II	Realistic	38.3%	Social	21.9%	Conventional	14.9%
Job III	Realistic	40.6%	Conventional	24.6%	Social	15.2%

Sources of information leading to the choice of jobs are given in Table 3. Job preference is based on *three* important sources.

Table 3
Sources of Information and Job Preferences in Percentages

Job Preferences	Own Reading	Parent	Teacher/School	Peer
Job I	46.4	19.2	18.6	–
Job II	41.1	11.3	17.0	17.0
Job III	45.2	–	13.1	15.3

When it comes to questions pertaining to jobs that require more specific responses, we found the following data shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Knowledge of Jobs Preferred by Students in Percentages

Job Preferences			Response
I	II	III	
70.7	71.6	68.3	knew where to get the job.
76.6	77.1	78.1	have seen people in that job.
64.5	65.2	60.6	knew the entry requirements to the job.
35.7	32.3	40.7	knew about the salary structure.
43.5	34.2	40.1	knew the upward mobility within the job.

Students were also asked to indicate the factors they considered important when entering a job (Table 5).

Table 5
Factors Determining Job Preferences in Percentages

Job Preferences	Factors				
	Salary	Status	Work Setting	Authority	Security
Job I	21.9	10.6	26.9	4.2	26.2
Job II	33.0	13.6	28.7	5.0	19.4
Job III	32.1	10.2	32.8	3.6	21.1

In addition, they were also required to indicate their preferences towards the agencies they would like to work with, the nature of job (regular or shifts) and the working days per week. The findings are indicated below.

85.5% – government sector
9.5% – private sector
5.7% – self-employed
87.3% – regular

12.6% – irregular (shifts)
42.9% – five-day week
57.0% – six-day week

The students were asked to indicate the level of academic/professional qualification (Table 6) that match their career choices.

Table 6
Level of Academic Job Preferences and Professional Qualifications

Job Preferences	Required Qualifications					
	LCE	SC	HSC	College	Poly-technic	University
Job I	.709	14.8	7.8	6.3	2.8	67.3
Job II	–	17.1	11.0	12.0	3.5	55.7
Job III	.709	36.0	7.0	7.8	1.4	46.8

Note: LCE = Lower Certificate of Education
SC = Malaysian School Certificate
HSC = Higher School Certificate

CONCLUSION

Based on the statistics presented earlier on, it is observed that generally the physical facilities and the manpower available are adequate for the purpose of conducting guidance services. However, the statistics also indicate some deficiencies, namely:

(1) The career section in the library is still inadequate, presumably due to a lack of space, funds or knowledge about career information. About 82% of the school libraries in rural schools lack career materials.
(2) While there is a relative improvement with regard to percentage of students meeting the counsellors and discussing their problems or plans, there is still a good majority of them (78%) who have not come forward. This may be due to a lack of activities, time, publicity, knowledge about the role of guidance teacher and, perhaps, some of their problems have been resolved at home by the parents.
(3) Career and counselling activities have not been extensively organised and, if organised, may not be seen as useful by the students.

It is interesting to note that career choices by the students are still limited and stereotyped. There is an over-propensity towards military services, followed by the medical and teaching professions. The choices

seem to be influenced by altruistic values – the desire to do services to the nation. Such choices raise some questions. Firstly, there is currently a strong move to reduce intake into the Government services and to expand manpower within the private and industrial sectors. Yet, very few indicated their preference for entrepreneurship. It is, however, heartening to note that the choices of at least 1.4% of the subjects indicated are in this direction.

There seems to be a limited knowledge about careers, presumably due to a lack of exposure. In choosing military services, the subjects were quite unrealistic since the intake is being reduced. The desire to move into the medical profession could have been prompted by the current controversy and attention given to doctors in this country. It cannot be denied that the medical profession is also a prestigious one.

A departure from the previous situation is that the majority of the students obtained their career information through their own reading. While their efforts are commendable, yet it is possible that such an approach has brought about limited knowledge as well as the stereotyped choices. It is also interesting to note that only 2% to 7% of the students obtained career information from their guidance teachers. It may be a depressing situation but yet one has to acknowledge several constraints that exist.

Parents and subject teachers are playing a more active role in this area. However, the extent of knowledge of these people vis-a-vis career information may also be limited, particularly among parents in the rural areas. Information obtained through peers may suffer from several deficiencies.

Based on statistics, we found that the students generally have adequate knowledge about the jobs they choose, either as first, second or third choice. They knew less of the salary structure, although salary was considered the most important factor in their vocational choice. This may be due to inavailability of information about salary structures.

They generally lack knowledge about upward mobility in a particular job. This is closely related to the above phenomenon since salary structures and upward mobility are inter-related.

Three factors were generally considered important in their vocational choices, namely, salary, work setting and security.

In as far as salary is concerned, about 66% indicated a salary range of M$1,000 to M$3,000 as being adequate to enjoy a comfortable life. We feel that their estimate is realistic.

Why security constitutes an important factor can perhaps be related to the types of jobs they prefer. As indicated earlier on, a high percentage (85.8%) prefer to serve with the Government where tenureship is almost guaranteed once a person is confirmed in the service.

With regard to work setting, students in the urban schools preferred to stay where they were while students from the rural school chose to work

in the urban areas. The preference expressed by the rural school students may be due to:

(1) better facilities;
(2) greater job opportunities; and
(3) the present trend of rural-urban migration as propagated by the policy makers.

If we relate the statistics on job choices and academic requirements, we would see a realistic aspiration in that a vast majority of the subjects indicated university as the highest academic level they wished to pursue. While such aspirations are quite related to vocational preferences, they may also be fairly unrealistic in as far as educational opportunities and job markets at tertiary level are concerned.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having reviewed the historical development of guidance in Malaysian schools and the relevant research studies pertaining to career guidance, we feel we are now in a somewhat better position to offer some recommendations.

We propose to present our views under four different sub-sections, namely:

(1) facilities;
(2) activities;
(3) personnel; and
(4) policy.

Facilities

(1) Proper guidance rooms should be provided so that guidance activities could be conducted effectively. Telephones should also be provided to facilitate communication.
(2) All school libraries must have a section on careers and adequate publicity of its existence must be made.
(3) Special bulletin boards at appropriate points must be provided to draw attention of the students to the latest information.
(4) Career guidance activities must be adequately publicised through regular blurbs and news bulletin.
(5) Section on careers in the school libraries should be adequately provided with various forms of vocational and educational information. Non-printed materials such as audio-tapes, video-tapes and slides should also be made available. This vocational and educational

information must include materials from the public as well as the private sector. Dictionaries of occupations or classifications of occupations should also be made available.

(6) Public media service such as radio, television and newspaper should be made accessible to rural communities. In the case of the radio and television, one must ensure good transmission.

Activities

(1) Activities that are organised should be meaningful and commensurate with the educational levels of the students.

(2) There must be a variety in the activities organised to sustain interest.

(3) Students should be encouraged to participate in organising these activities to provide relevant experience and opportunity for them to meet people.

Personnel

(1) In line with the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee Report (1979), each school should be provided with a full-time, professionally trained counsellor for every 1,000 students.

(2) In addition, a minimum of one support staff (a clerk or typist) should also be provided to assist the counsellor with his day-to-day routine.

(3) Parents and members of the community should be brought in to participate in drawing up plans for the year. These community resources should also be used to provide assistance when organising activities.

Policy

(1) Adequate funding is very crucial to achieve any measure of success. For without it, much of what is planned will not be implemented. This has in fact been one of the major factors that has often been discussed.

(2) A system of supervision and training at district level must also be considered so that some key personnel are always available for quick consultation.

(3) Researches must be more aggressively pursued. It is hoped that through these researches, we can develop our own model of guidance services and counselling that is commensurate with our culture and value systems.

(4) Local test batteries should be developed to assist counsellors in their efforts to obtain a better understanding of their clients.

(5) Counsellors should avoid operating purely from his office. Strategies must be thought out so that he can meet and talk with students to remove any possible barrier. He must be seen to be approachable and helpful.

(6) Periodic conferences must be organised to allow teachers and interested personnel to share their experiences and discuss common problems.

(7) Guidance teachers must also teach a few periods a week so that they can be attuned to the needs and interests of students.

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Some Aspects of Student Development in Malaysian Universities **

T.Marimuthu

Some of the data collected for the study on student development in Malaysian universities were presented and discussed. Amongst the 693 students interviewed, the majority of them (52.4%) wanted to be brilliant students compared with other categories such as star atheletes, leaders in campus activities and popular students. This showed the importance attached to academic work.

Then the characteristics of a popular student in the campus were explored. Being active in campus activities, widely-read and excelling in studies were considered to be the most important factors for a student to be popular amongst his peers in the university.

In discussing social and leisure activities amongst university students, it was found that the most regular leisure-time activities of a majority of students were reading of newspapers (85.0%), followed by listening to the radio/music (50.0%) and discussing work with friends (30.0%).

Interaction amongst students was the other aspect that was discussed. It was found that the strongest tendency in friendship groupings among students in Malaysian universities was ethnicity. This factor was selected by 46.0% of the total sample while the second most important category was provincialism which was selected by 22.0% of the students. A total of 16.0% of the students stated that they mixed freely and 13.0% felt that the groupings were on the basis of social class background. Only a small minority (4.0%) mentioned other factors such as a common religion, similar courses taken together and others as the basis of their getting together.

Finally, changes in the personality characteristics of the students were discussed. The majority of the students felt that the period spent in the

university has influenced their attitudes, values and beliefs. They perceived that they have become more independent, mature, confident and realistic. They also stated that they have become less tense, materialistic, impulsive, lazy and snobbish.

The Needs of Malaysian Youth

Mohd. Yunus Mohd. Noor

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the needs of Malaysian youth from three different perspectives:

(1) personal background;
(2) educational background; and
(3) vocational background

In the first two perspectives – personal and educational background – the kinds of change that Malaysian youth are experiencing today are dealt with. Regarding vocational background, the pressures confronting Malaysian youth and their vocational needs are examined in detail. This is an area for which the young people of Malaysia are inadequately prepared and wrongly motivated.

Malaysia is a very 'youthful' country. Well over half (68.3 per cent) of the population are below 30 years of age (see Figure 1). From the population pyramid below, it can be seen that 41.6 per cent of the population are between 10 and 30 years of age. This is the age range that will be the concern of this paper.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

This is an area which is currently undergoing tremendous change and influencing the attitudes and values of youth today.

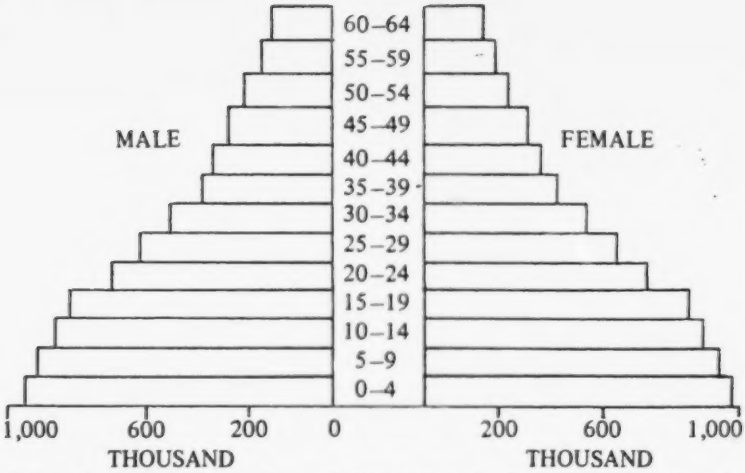

Figure 1: The Distribution of Population in Malaysia According to Sex, 1980

Changes in Family Patterns

The once familiar traditional home with its extended family is becoming rare. Young people no longer benefit from the influence of grandparents, uncles and aunts, and other relatives who live in the same house or in houses nearby. They now grow up in neighbourhoods surrounded by strangers and they only have their parents to help them in the process of growing up. Quite often, this help is not even available because both parents work outside the home, often for long periods at a time. Young people, therefore, are often left to develop with minimal adult guidance. Consequently, they learn to rely a great deal on their siblings or peers. Some of them may have the benefit of live-in domestic helpers who provide some form of supervision and guidance. However, domestic helpers are often 'strangers' in the home. They seldom develop emotional links with the families with whom they stay and often prefer to remain as 'outsiders'.

Apart from the diminishing influence of the extended family and the increase of the nuclear family, the Malaysian population is becoming more mobile. A considerable number of people shift to urban areas to seek better jobs and higher wages. There is also an urban to rural shift with the establishment of land development schemes which provide agricultural opportunities as sources of income. Unfortunately, these shifts often deny youth the opportunity to develop lasting friendships. In urban areas too, young people are usually physically isolated and fenced in, and this can curb both their physical and social development.

Personal Adjustment Problems

As more and more young people are subjected to the new family situation, they become more and more isolated. Most of them become less self-confident and have problems meeting their adjustment needs. They often have problems getting along with their peers and they have little knowledge of their own personal assets and limitations.

Their future becomes uncertain. They sometimes have to decide whether to continue schooling or to look for a job. About three-quarters of this age group leave school or formal education after the age of 15.

Pressures on Youth

Malaysian youth are subjected to a great deal of pressure. Apart from educational pressure which will be discussed later on, they are subjected to two other major sources of pressure.

Religious Pressure

There is at the moment a religious revival in Malaysia and people are increasingly turning to religion. A considerable number of young people have joined religious movement to escape the various pressures and uncertainties facing them. While some participate in these movements because of their religious convictions, others participate because they have been forced to do so.

Malaysian youth involved in religious activities spend a great deal of time in prayer, religious talks and missionary activities. To this group of people, religion is given top priorities. Studies and other activities assume minor roles. Those who participate under duress lose out in the long run. They not only fail to achieve salvation through their religious participation but also hardly achieve any success in their studies or other activities. In short, this group of young people suffer from various kinds of minor conflict and uncertainties.

The involvement of youth in religious activities has seriously affected the growth of sporting and cultural activities in the country. These young people are either discouraged or prevented from participating in games and cultural activities. The number of good sportsmen and sportswomen, in particular, is sadly declining. Even physical education classes in schools are affected by this situation.

Drug Addiction

Apart from religious revival, the youth of Malaysia are under constant threat by another group of people – those who are trying to weaken the nation by influencing its young to go on drugs. This may be an organised ideologicals sabotage of a nation or motivation by individuals or groups to make phenomenal profits. Whatever the motivation, the fact remains that the majority of addicts in this country are young men and women.

Initially, drug addiction was confined to youth who had left school – the so-called 'dropouts'. Gradually, the addiction spreads to students in institutions of higher learning, and secondary and primary schools. Eventually it may even reach the pupils in kindergartens!

The ease with which drugs can be acquired makes it very difficult for youth to keep away from them. Peer pressure sometimes becomes so strong that young people have no option but to try drugs at least once in order to stop the harassment from friends. In some cases, the initial consumption of drugs is merely the beginning! To some, drugs offer the escape they need from the pressures and uncertainties confronting them. Drugs are also readily available to those who need them. Where they come from and who supplies them are questions which often baffle the authorities. The threat of the death penalty has not deterred drug trafficking.

Influence of the Mass Media

Malaysian youth of today are beginning to read more newspaper, magazines and books. A recent study on the reading habits of Malaysian people revealed that 97% of the 15,054 people interviewed read newspapers, about 67% read magazines and 42% read books.[1] Youth are, therefore, becoming more aware of what is happening around them and in the world at large. This knowledge is augmented by what they hear and see on the television screen. In the same research, 35% of the respondents placed watching television as their main leisure-time activity and 21% indicated reading as their first choice.

In another study involving 1,559 first year students at the University of Malaya, 93% of them indicated that they watched television regularly.[2] About 58% of them viewed television shows for more than four hours a week. Of this group, about 16% watched for more than 11 hours a week. Apart from television 88.3% of these first year students listened to the radio.

Based on the recollection of first year students of a Malaysian university, it appears that they spent more time watching television and listening to the radio than presently as they had less academic work to pursue in their younger days. In many cases, children had limited choice of activities due to the lack of play areas at home and friends to play with. A considerable proportion of the viewing and listening is done on their own without adult supervision and guidance. They therefore tend to assimilate almost everything that they see and hear in the programmes, and some of these elements are incorporated into their value system. Some of these young people who are urbanised lack adult supervision and posses weak religious foundations, becoming 'strangers' in their own culture.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

This is yet another area in which Malaysian youth are subjected to tremendous pressure.

Overemphasis on the Importance of Schooling

Parents believe that success in schooling means success in life. As a result, parents spend a great deal of money on their children to ensure success. A majority of the children are given tuition either at home or at school. Apart from providing them with tuition, parents often offer material or monetary incentives to ensure that children become successful in public examinations. Gifts are bestowed on children who excel and they include bicycles, motorcycles, personal computers, trips to Disneyland and even cars.

Part of the reason some parents resort to the above motivational behaviour is to compensate for their own shortcomings as parents. They realise that they are unable to spend sufficient time with their children and are prepared to pay others to provide the assistance in the way of tuition, music lessons, ballet classes, and computer-programming lessons.

Many parents feel that such activities 'benefit' their children tremendously. They believe that they are providing their children with skills and knowledge that they themselves have not had the chance to acquire as children. Furthermore, they feel that they owe this to the children who should be much better off than they themselves.

What many parents fail to realise is that these children need them – their time, concern guidance and security – rather than what money can purchase. Furthermore, the emphasis on learning and success puts very strong pressures on children. Parents often regard their children's success as their own personal success and the latter seems to realise this fully. As a result, children become more tense and anxious as parents' expectations increase. Some of the children fail to cope with parental expectations and develop various psychosomatic illnesses, and resort to drugs, religion and even violence.

Lack of Coping Skills

Young people enter school with very wide discrepencies in their knowledge and skill. Some of the students enter school totally equipped with the knowledge of the three Rs. Others begin schooling with no knowledge of it all. Consequently, some of the children are likely to be left behind in their coping skills. There are pupils who are unable to read or write after six years of primary education. Teachers cannot meet the demands of these students because of their limited time and resources. At the same time, classes are large and if the teachers concerned hold back the progress of the class for the benefit of a few, the majority will be disadvantaged.

Many of the teachers consider the school curriculum to be too broad and too loaded. The complain is that time given to complete the syllabuses is inadequate and a high proportion of the teachers rush through them without ensuring learning effectiveness. At the end of the school year, students have a great deal to learn and absorb. Without study skills, they often resort to memorising a whole year's work.

School teachers spend considerable energy and effort in simulating public examinations, including proper trial examinations. As a result, teachers, emphasise on examination know how and the majority of students spend their time in perfecting their examination performance. A high proportion of the time is taken in examining past examination papers and anticipating future questions. This kind of behaviour only encourages the 'spotting' of questions and 'preparing' of model answers. It is thus not surprising that the best sellers on the book market today are model answers to public examinations.

The final outcome of all these activities is that students are very well trained or rehearsed for public examinations but probably not very well educated! An average first-year university student is a person who has been rehearsing examination techniques for the last thirteen years. He tends to perpetuate this skill within the university and when he leaves, he is still only well-trained but not educated.

Lack of Interest in Co-curricular Activities

With the overemphasis on examinations in school, the influence of the mass media, especially television at home, and religious pressures, the youth of today have little or no time to pursue co-curricular activities. Very few students have interests or hobbies at home. Even hobby clubs in schools are dwindling in numbers and variety. School societies and clubs have difficulties in maintaining their membership. Sporting activities are also adversely affected. In fact, the standard of sports throughout the country is being lowered very rapidly at all levels of education. The performance of our students in inter-ASEAN sporting activities attest to the fall in sports standards.

Cultural activities are similarly affected and it is very difficult to find enough volunteers to participate in cultural dances, drama and musical performances. Not only are there inadequate numbers of volunteers but also the dearth of talents among the students.

With this lack of interest in co-curricular activities, schools are unable to produce well-rounded students who can fit into any environment or situation. Instead, we have students who are very limited in their knowledge, extremely close minded or prejudiced in their thinking, and unable to accommodate or appreciate other viewpoints. Above all, there is a general atmosphere of lethargy, malaise and lack of initiative or drive among youth.

VOCATIONAL BACKGROUND

In this section, the kinds of change that Malaysian youth are experiencing, the pressures confronting them and their vocational needs will be examined in detail.

Over-emphasis on the Importance of a University Education

In giving talks to upper and post-secondary students, the question that is always asked of the audience is, 'How many of you would want to go to the university?'. The response is always a positive 'yes' by all members of the audience. Following this they are asked to assess their chances by examining their school performance over the years. On an average, between 2% and 20% of the sixth formers in an average school are able to gain admission to a university. In spite of the limited opportunities, every single student wants to get a place in a university.

Each year, about 65% of the Malaysian Certificate Examination candidates are awarded full certificates. Of this, only about 30% are eligible to enter sixth-form classes. However, there are only sufficient places for about 10% of these students in the sixth-form classes and thus the remaining 20% either enter the job market or pursue sixth form studies in private or commercial schools with the hope that they will gain a place in the university. While others pursue overseas education on their own, about 1% gains entry into the special preparatory courses at the local universities. About 2% are given government scholarships to study overseas. The Malaysian teachers training colleges are able to accommodate another 3.5% while the polytechnics take in less than 1% of school certificate holders.

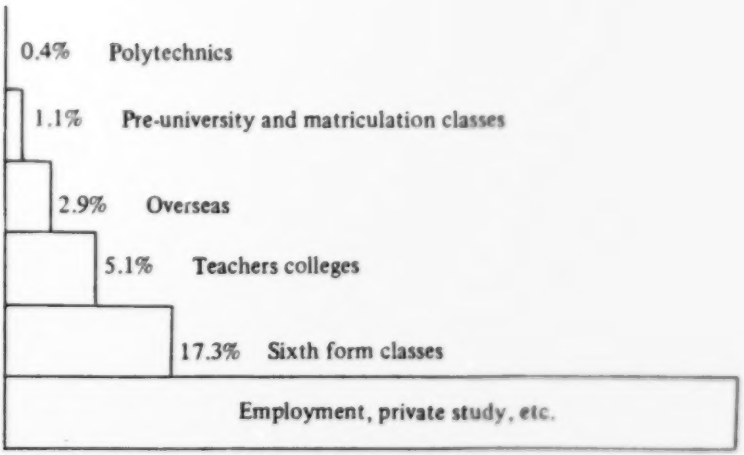

Figure 2: Prospects of School Certificate Holders

The prospects for Malaysian Higher School Certificate holders in gaining entry to the university is not very favourable. In 1982, 54,933 school and private candidates sat for the examination but only about 48% were eligible to enter the local universities. Furthermore, the universities could only accommodate about 30% of those who had the necessary entry qualification. Hence, about 70% had either to enter the job market or re-sit the examination to improve their grades. Some were able to pursue further studies overseas.

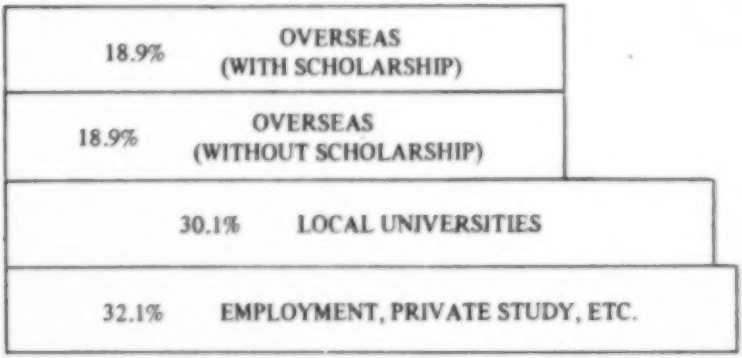

Figure 3: Prospects of Malaysian Higher School Certificate Holders

Malaysian students are so obsessed with the need for a university degree that some of them re-sit the examination five or more times. Private institutions catering for the major public examinations are thriving on this obsession. The university is looked upon as the ultimate goal, as the assurance of security, most prestigious and most fulfilling achievement. Failure to achieve this status is often looked upon as a failure in life. Leaving school at any stage is usually not by choice but by force of circumstances. These students are considered as 'dropouts' rather than as 'graduates' of a certain level of schooling.

Limited Choice of Jobs

Malaysian youth have a very limited knowledge of the jobs available in the country. Most of them are only aware of the prestigious jobs and very few can name more than 50 different occupations. This lack of information is also highlighted in local studies (Yip, 1965; Reutens, 1967; Amir @ Khamis bin Awang, 1970; Lee, 1976; Goon, 1975 and Rahimah Mohd Sura, 1983).

The desire for prestigious jobs are further reinforced by the schools. In their efforts to motivate students to strive hard to achieve success in life, teachers tend to invite professionals such as doctors, lawyers, architects,

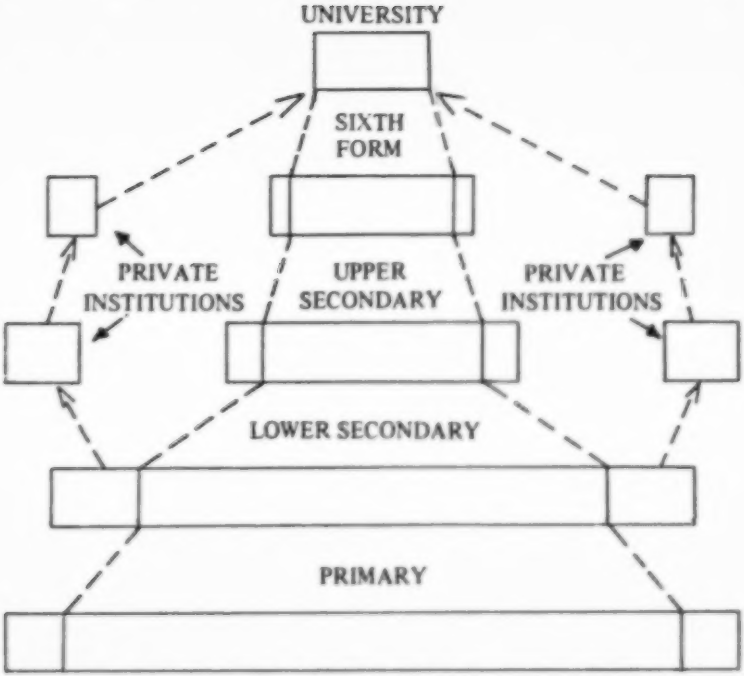

Figure 4: The Scramble for University Places

accountants and engineers to talk to them. Occasionally, university lecturers and members of the armed forces are invited. Such programmes can only strengthen students' desire to attend university because all of the professional jobs require a university education or its equivalent. Since they are not exposed to other types of jobs, their knowledge is only limited to the few prestigious occupations.

Lopsidedness in the Job Structure

Owing to the limited choice of jobs and the overemphasis on university education, the job structure in the Malaysian market has become very lopsided. There is a very large group in the general labour force and a fairly large proportion of semi-skilled workers who acquire their skills mainly through experience. In the middle of this occupational structure, there is a small group of skilled manpower and an even smaller number of semi-professionals. At the top, there is quite a large group of professionals and an even bigger proportion of policy-makers and administrators. Such an occupational structure does not always contribute to effective and efficient services since the professionals and semi-professionals are unable to provide the necessary support to the policy-makers.

Figure 5: Distribution of the Malaysian Work Force

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

The personal, educational and vocational problems raised so far do not have simple solutions. They are very complicated and concerted efforts at the family, school and national levels are called for to overcome these problems.

At the Family Level

The family is the first and most important group that influences youth. Young people and their stability depend very heavily on how they have been treated by their parents. Thus, parental involvement is vital in the development of youth.

Concern for Children

Many young people in Malaysia today are neglected by their parents primarily due to changes in family patterns. When young people are in trouble or suffering from stress, parents are often not around to give them the emotional support they need. Young people either have to rely on their friends and siblings or suffer the trauma on their own. This is especially true of those children who are sent to fully residential schools.

Parents, therefore, must make concerted efforts to be with their children as often as possible. For example, meal times should be occasions for family members to be together. The sending of children to school

should also be the responsibility of parents. Week-ends should be for the family.

The primary aim is to create occasions for families to be together since opportunities to be together are so limited. Being together provides children with emotional support and stability. Also, it is one of the ways whereby the generation gap can be bridged.

Provide Moral and Religious 'Anchors'

Moral and religious education needs to be provided at home so that children can develop a stable emotional foundation. In times of crisis and when parents are not around to give their support, children can be guided by their moral and religious beliefs. Moral behaviour, unlike religious education, cannot be taught. Moral education is acquired mainly through observation and living within a moral environment. Parents therefore have to be careful in what they do or say at home because children tend to imitate them. In fact, parents have to be constantly aware of their behaviour in front of the children.

Control the Use of the Mass Media

It is very difficult to control what young people read today because materials which are not available at home can be obtained outside it. However, control can be exercised in what they see on television. Television creates an impact on young people as it appeals directly to all of their senses and makes a lasting impression on them. Most of the programmes on television which interest young people are those imported from the West and imbued with Western values. A number of them display moral values which are even questionable in the West itself. Some programmes are very violent while others are extremely romantic.

Young people are not selective in their choices of programmes and values. They imitate what they like, even though the values may be unacceptable to the Malaysian way of life. It is therefore important for parents to watch the programmes with their children and distinguish for the young the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

Also, children should not be allowed to watch anything and everything that is shown on television. Unlimited viewing will only curb their reading habit and interest in hobbies and games. Excessive television viewing affects both their mental alertness as well as physical health.

Reduce Pressure by the Family

Many young people today are encouraged by their parents to succeed academically and even to pursue courses and obtain jobs that may not interest them at all. Such actions on the part of parents put undue pressure on their children. Some young people may cope with such pressures while a majority are likely to suffer or even fail to succeed.

Young people who are over-pressured suffer from dilemmas of various kinds. Although they are aware that they are unlikely to succeed, yet this is not communicated to the parents. This may be due to the fact that they respect their parents or they are too afraid to do so. In cases where the children eventually inform their parents of their inability to fulfil parental wishes, they are reprimanded and greater pressure is subsequently applied. This will, in fact, raise the level of anxiety among children and their chances of success is very much reduced.

In trying to motivate their children, parents must take into consideration their children's interests and strengths. Also, children should be allowed to suggest what they wish to do. If parents disagree with their suggestions, the matter can be discussed further until young people realise or become totally aware of the consequences of their own choices. If parents are unable to offer suggestions, it is advisable to consult friends or family members who can help.

At the School Level

Children spend at least six hours a day at school. If they take part in games or other activities, they may stay on for eight or nine hours a day. This is equivalent to the time taken by adults at their places of work. The school, therefore, is responsible for about half the waking hours of children. Hence, it should shoulder about half of the responsibilities for their upbringing.

Role of the School Is to Educate and Not to Merely Train

Malaysian schools have the tendency to merely train their students and not to educate them. The main emphasis is on the achievement of the school and not of the students. Teachers and students orientate their entire learning programmes towards national examinations. Much time and effort are taken to train students to improve their examination performance so as to ensure success of the school.

It is pointless to try to pinpoint which party is at fault. While parents blame the school, the school in turn puts the blame on the 'authorities' – meaning the Education departments and the Ministry who, in turn, shifts the responsibility to society and the job market. The feeling is that no one party is totally responsible. We are all to be blamed and equally responsible for the shortcomings in the education system. In fact, we are somewhat trapped in a vicious cycle.

A reduction in the emphasis on pure academic achievement is needed. Children normally have a wide range of academic potentials. Their intelligence quotient may range from as low as 70 to as high as 150 and more. What all of us are trying to do is to make everyone succeed beyond what most of them are capable of. To succeed in the Lower Certificate of Education (after three years of secondary education), children need to per-

form at a level equal to those who perhaps have IQ's of around 100. If they want to succeed at the School Certificate level (after five years of secondary education), then they may have to perform at an even higher IQ level. If children who do not have this potential attempt to sit such examinations, they are bound to fail. Their chances may not improve even if they try again.

Students who do not possess good academic potentials often excel in other non-academic areas. They may be very capable with their hands and do well in sports, cultural pursuits and other areas which do not require reading or studying. Such areas need to be emphasised and given recognition within the school curriculum.

In giving students a varied programme within the school, the pressure to succeed in academic work only will be reduced. It also gives students a feeling of satisfaction and pride, and may lead to greater intrinsic motivation and interests in their studies. Students then will be better educated and better prepared to 'face the world'.

Increase the Youth's Awareness of the Employment World

It is the school's responsibility to help students become more aware of the employment world. This can be done in a number of ways.

Talks on careers should be held regularly in school. These talks should be given by speakers of different occupations and should not be confined to professionals such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, architects and accountants. Students must be exposed to a wide range of occupations such as factory managers, police officers and hospital matrons to enable them to choose careers relevant to their abilities.

Career exhibitions can be organised in a school once or twice a year. Posters, films and slides relating to various kinds of jobs should be shown. Also, representatives from various organisations can be invited to answer queries on jobs within their establishments. These exhibitions may be organised on a small scale in the individual school or on a fairly large scale at the district level.

Career information, a responsibility of the school, is to be provided by the guidance teacher and the class teachers. A notice board on careers with information from the newspapers, career booklets and career sheets from organisations will be useful. The board can be subdivided into different levels of education so that students can ascertain clearly what jobs are available for their educational qualification.

Job description sheets must be changed regularly. The information can be acquired through the parents, relatives and friends of the students themselves. Parents can also be invited to talk to the children on the type and nature of their jobs. This can be done during the period after tests or examinations.

There is a need to *humanise Malaysian schools*. Today, the school in Malaysia is a very 'cold', 'dehumanised' and 'spartan-like'. Nearly all of

the programmes in the school are aimed at satisfying group rather than individual needs. Students are treated *en-masse* or as groups. The learning process, sports and cultural and co-curricular activities and other programmes are carried out in groups. Individuals are ignored and they are not encouraged to display their individualism. As a result, students look upon the school as an alien institution. They do not feel that they belong to the school and that the school belongs to them. The school is not an attractive place for them.

Even the classroom where they spend most of their time does not seem attractive. They are not motivated to look after or to beautify their classroom. This is partly due to the fact that classrooms are used by the students of both the morning and afternoon sessions.

The classrooms are often very bare, with broken desks and chairs stacked at the back. Also the soft boards and the blackboards are not looked after and sometimes there are punch-holes in them. Study materials, charts or other teaching aids are not displayed in the classrooms. The classroom windows are sometimes without glass panes. Students often have to learn in a hot environment within a crowded classroom. The ceiling fans quite often do not work or if they do, their speed is so fast that students find it difficult to keep the pages from flapping.

Students themselves are largely to be blamed for some of the destruction in the classrooms. The destruction is a manifest of their frustrations brought about by several factors. One of them is the pressure school and parents impose upon them. The Departments of Education put pressure on headmasters who, in turn, exert pressure on the teachers to produce good examination results. This pressure to succeed is passed on to the student who have no one to impose their pressure on except the desks, chairs, cupboards, softboards, blackboards, windows, and other items in the classroom. Schools therefore must improve the student's attitudes towards school and schooling. Class teachers should make greater efforts to get to know the forty to fifty students in their class. They should know their students by name, where they live and who their parents are. It is useful for teachers to meet parents to discuss the progress of their children. This can be done by inviting parents to collect their children's report cards in school and at parent-teacher gatherings. Parents, teachers and students can be brought together by organising project days at the school, fun fair, canteen day, 'cleaning and repair' day, joggathon or walkathon and sports day.

To humanise the school further and to involve parents in school activities, the talents of parents should not be ignored. The school can involve parents by inviting those with coaching knowledge to help school teams, with musical knowledge to train the students in music, and with artistic and technical skills to demonstrate their know-how to students.

One other suggestion is to place every young student in the charge of two senior students – one from the middle level and one from the top

level of schooling. The three of them can meet at least once a week to discuss the study and personal problems of the junior student. This method will help the junior student understand his lessons better and provide all of them with a sense of utility and feeling of usefulness and belongingness. A special period should be allocated for this purpose so that teachers can assist if help is required.

At the National Level

At this level, we should aim at reducing the strong desire to go to the university as this will only perpetuate the existing occupational structure which has a high concentration of policy-makers, administrators and professionals. It should be more pyramidal in shape as shown in Figure 7.

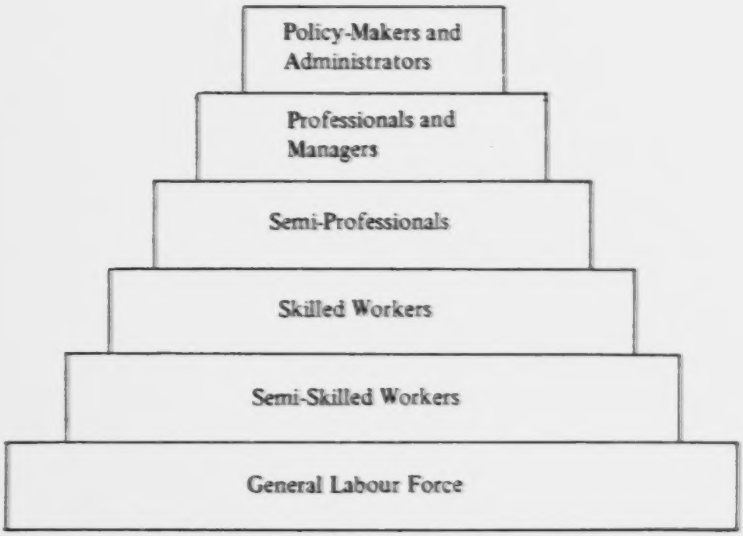

Figure 6: The Ideal Distribution of the Malaysian Work Force

The pressure for university places should not be met by building more universities or by sending students to universities abroad. Such actions will never be able to satisfy for all times and demand for tertiary education. Given that the number of university places falls short of the number who are eligible for an university education, the tendency is for the universities to enrol the top students. The majority of the university aspirants are thus "forced" to enter the job market. Some are admitted to institutions which offer professional and practical training. In fact, these are the institutions that can enhance students' chances of success in the labour market in view of the shortage of skilled and semi-professional workers.

Presently, institutions offering professional and practical training are limited in number. Such institutions include the MARA Institute of Technology, the Tunku Abdul Rahman College, four polytechnics and a number of small privately-run institutions. The number of such institutions needs to be increased to cater for alternative training programmes and meet manpower needs (Figure 8). For every one university, there ought to be at least three colleges and polytechnics, and several institutes for technical and business training.

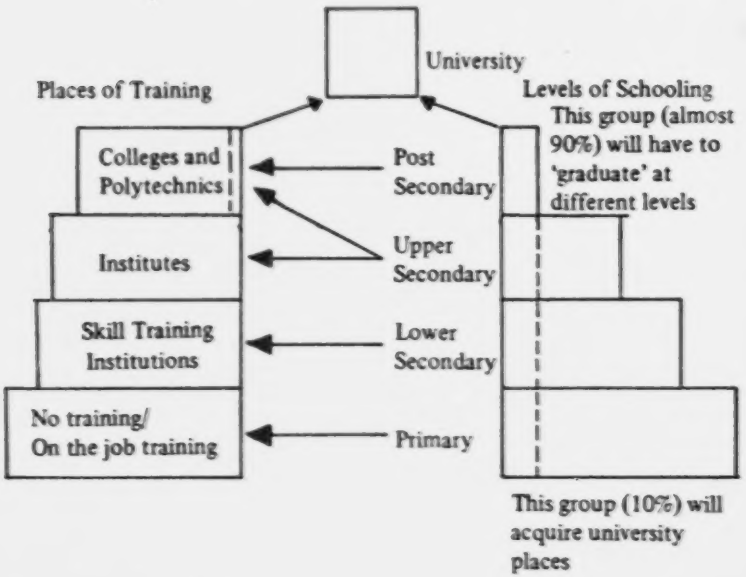

Figure 7: Alternative Training Institutions for Students from Different Levels of Schooling

CONCLUSION

Malaysia is a progressive country which is experiencing changes in the political, social, economic and even religious spheres. A sector of the population that is undergoing considerable change is the Malaysian youth. Considerable pressure is placed on young people to succeed in life. A university education is often perceived to be their main or even only ticket to success in the world of work. Consequently, there is an excessive demand for university places and if students fail to acquire a place at their first attempt, they will try and try until they succeed. It is for this reason that measures must be taken at the family, school and national levels to ensure that youth are given more chances and better alternatives in preparing themselves for work and a place in society.

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